SISTER ROSALIE’S CREATIVITY AND DARING IN RESPONDING TO THE UNMET NEEDS OF THOSE WHO WERE POOR

United to God, whom they served in the person of the poor, Sister Rosalie and her companions sought to respond to the ever-growing needs of the people of the Mouffetard district. As we have seen when Sister Rosalie began her life as a Daughter of Charity she had worked, first at the Maison Saint-Martin and later in the house on rue de l’Épée-de-Bois, in both the education of little girls and health care. Once she became superior of the house and the desperate needs of the people became even more evident to her, she searched for new ways to respond to them. This would require creativity, because resources were extremely limited, and daring, since some of her methods were as yet unproven and elicited reticence and even opposition. Nevertheless, she persevered in her attempts to provide services for the needy that would accompany them from the cradle to the grave. Father Emery’s words, uttered when he heard that his young godchild was being placed in the Saint-Marceau district, were to prove prophetic: “This is truly the place that you need. You will be the servant of all these poor people.” And so she would be for nearly half-a-century.

Let us now examine these new initiatives in chronological order. As Father Beaudoin notes in the Positio, Sister Rosalie’s biographers and the witnesses for the Cause of Beatification speak of these undertakings in greater or lesser detail. It is difficult, however, in most instances, to know precise dates or exactly how the works functioned. The most complete listing comes from Sister Saillard who states:

The day classes had become very numerous. Soon there was a day shelter [for children too old for the day nursery and too young for the school]; a day nursery, which allowed mothers living in poverty to...

505 Sacra Congregatio Pro Causis, Rendu, Positio; Sommaire, 83.
506 Sacra Congregatio Pro Causis, Rendu, Positio, 74.
work without abandoning their babies; the ouvrir, which was open to young girls, who would later increase [the numbers coming to] the social center and the Children of Mary and finally go on to the meetings of Christian Mothers. A day shelter for the elderly was the last of her works.\textsuperscript{307}

First, the Day Nursery Saint-Marcel (1844). In today's society, the provision for and the funding of quality, affordable day care is a major political issue that a candidate for public office ignores at his or her own peril. Such was not always the case. The wealthy had no interest in it, since they could easily hire wet nurses and governesses to care for their children when they were young, and then place them in boarding schools as they grew older. Babies of women who had to work if their families were to survive were left without any reliable care. It would only be toward the mid-nineteenth century that four Frenchmen, among them Armand de Melun, would initiate this necessary work in Paris. It spread quickly throughout the French capital, due in great measure to Sister Rosalie's influence. She had seen the great need and opened a day care above the school, staffed by the sisters on rue de l'Épée-de-Bois.\textsuperscript{308}

The purpose of the day nursery was to provide care for newborns while their mothers worked. A new concept, it met with opposition from the very beginning. According to Melun, who was intimately involved in the work, this resistance centered around two points. The work was seen as encouraging mothers to neglect their duties to their children, and as posing a health hazard by having babies so close together in one place.\textsuperscript{309}

Sister Rosalie, however, was undeterred. She considered the first objection without merit as the babies were in the nursery only when their mothers were at work. Moreover, the women came several times a day to nurse their infants. She commented:

Why accuse poor women of forgetting their maternal obligations for doing what women, who have neither

\textsuperscript{307} Sacra Congregatio Pro Causis, Rendu, \textit{Positio;} \textit{Sommaire}, 63.

\textsuperscript{308} Jeanne Danemarie, \textit{A travers trois Révolutions, Sœur Rosalie, Fille de la Charité} (Paris, 1947), 133.

\textsuperscript{309} Melun, \textit{Vie de la sœur Rosalie}, 65-66.
their work nor their misery as an excuse, do every
day without provoking complaints or reproach?310

Sister Rosalie also refused to be dissuaded by the second objection,
concerning the danger of exposing infants, crowded into a single
space, to disease. Her response was to point out to her critics the
contrast between the healthy appearance of the children of the nursery
and the sickly bodies of the infants huddled in the squalor of their
family's miserable lodgings. She welcomed the children and saw to it
that they were clean and cared for.311

The nursery was a great success. Its reputation spread and it
became a model for others. The then Archbishop of Paris, Monseigneur
Denis-Auguste Affre, S.S., had blessed it the day it opened. He
joyously told those assembled:

Oh! Paris, city admirable for your charity, if ever again
the celestial anger should weigh down upon you, you
can... obtain grace from God by raising your children
to heaven.312

Perhaps more indicative yet, of both Sister Rosalie's reputation and the
success of the day nursery, was the visit to it by the Emperor Napoléon
III and the Empress Eugénie on 18 March 1854. A painting, by the
artist Édouard-Alexandre Sain, commemorates the event. While
Sister Rosalie had been chagrined earlier by the visit of the Emperor's
representative, who had come to present her with the Cross of the
Legion of Honor, this time she joyously received the Imperial Couple.
Melun explains why:

She saw in this display of interest a lesson, for all civil
officials, of goodness and charity toward the lowly and
the weak and a recommendation to all those holding
positions of public authority, whatever their rank or
power, to be attentive, caring, and compassionate
toward the unfortunate whom sovereigns do not
disdain to visit.313

310 Ibid., 66.
311 Ibid., 66-67.
312 Melun, Vie de la sœur Rosalie, 143.
But, on a much more personal level, the day nursery was Sister Rosalie's "recreation, her pride, [and] her relaxation. She showed it to her friends [and] to strangers and went up there whenever she had a free moment." And she was beloved by the children and their mothers.

Other than these general considerations, we know little of the daily functioning of the day nursery. All the information we have comes from a single letter that Sister Rosalie wrote on 26 November 1852 to Madame Dussaussoy, wife of General Dussaussoy, Commandant of the Département Lot and Garonne-Agen, in response to her friend's request for information.

The Archives of the Daughters of Charity in Paris possess four letters from Sister Rosalie to Madame Dussaussoy between 21 February 1848 and 26 November 1852. They reveal a close friendship between the two women. Sister Rosalie seems to have known the family well. She expresses concern for Madame Dussaussoy's health,
for her husband and her father. When she lost her son, Sister Rosalie wrote, "I learned with sorrow of the grief you experienced at the death of your dear son. We are praying to God for the repose of his soul and for your consolation and preservation." Sister Rosalie regrets not being able to go to see her friend, and hopes they can meet again in Paris should she come there from Pau.

Sister Rosalie also shares her own concerns: her sorrow at the loss of a sister companion and her chagrin in being awarded the Cross of the Legion of Honor. Madame Dussaussoy is obviously a woman of means and influence since Sister Rosalie elicits her help in arranging a marriage between a certain Monsieur Collar and Isabelle de Serre, the godchild of the Dowager Queen of Naples. It appears likely that Madame Dussaussoy wants the financial report for the day nursery so that she can either help Sister Rosalie obtain some necessary funding, or assist in fundraising in her own region.

Money was always in short supply at rue de l'Épée-de-Bois, but the situation must have been more acute with the day nursery since the whole concept lacked broad public support. We will quote the entire report here as it reveals Sister Rosalie's creative response to an on-going challenge:

**General Observations**

At the Saint-Marcel Day Nursery, the expense for each infant averages 55 centimes per day. Insofar as they are able, the mothers make a small contribution of 15 centimes per day for the child. This, therefore, reduces the expense for the establishment to 40 centimes per day.

Each woman, who rocks the infants, receives 1 franc, 50 centimes a day. She receives no food.

By establishing an average of 35 infants a day, a day nursery would cost 1,200 francs, if a contribution from

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*Ibid*.

*Ibid*.

See *Letters of Sister Rosalie to Madame Dussaussoy*, 21 February 1848, AFCP, 8J2 - Ro - Le 210 Ro - La 41 GD 1; 26 November 1852, Ro - Le 214 Ro - La 42 GD 2; 14 March 1852, Ro - Le 258 Ro - La 43 GD 3.*
the mothers is required for all the infants and after all the expenses have been met. The cost of clothing is not included in this total.

Means we use to procure the funding vary and are sometimes difficult.

We have subscriptions of 5 to 10 francs per year.

We create cradles, which involves a one-time donation of 50 francs. This represents approximately the initial expense for the bed and bedding. In this case, a plaque, bearing the donor's name, is placed in the room. When a day nursery is opening, we easily obtain this kind of gift.

We have Complete Foundations, averaging an annual sum of 100 francs. The infant is placed in a cradle for which the complete cost is paid by his/her benefactor. If we receive a gift of 150 francs, the child's mother can also be excused from the 15 centimes contribution. For these foundations, a plaque, with the inscription:

Complete Foundation by Monsieur...

is placed at the head of the bed.

The Saint-Marcel Day Nursery, which has great difficulty in raising the funds necessary for its existence, also utilizes collections, sermons, lotteries etc.\(^{317}\)

The day nursery was another step in Sister Rosalie's work for women and children. Others would follow. This endeavor caused the Daughters of Charity to ask if this work should spread to other houses of the community located in similar neighborhoods. The decision of the General Council in this regard reflects the reticence of the public at large. On 4 February 1846, it was decided that:

\(^{317}\) Letter of Sister Rosalie to Madame Duessaussy, 26 November 1852, AFCP, 8J2 - Ro - La 44.
...no propositions which might be made in this matter would be accepted because the time and circumstances do not seem to guarantee us the good we would hope to accomplish by devoting ourselves to these services. This could come about in more favorable conditions and then, if such be the Will of God, this work could be combined with those that have already been confided to us.  

And, indeed, not too long afterwards, the Daughters of Charity, undoubtedly influenced by the model of the Saint-Marcel Day Nursery, would begin this work in other houses of the French capital. Thus, many more women and children would be better served.

Second, the Day Shelter for Children (1854). With both the day nursery and the school, Sister Rosalie and the sisters were able to provide care and education for children who would otherwise have received little or none at all. Nonetheless, she was to discover, to her dismay, that numerous children were “falling between the cracks” of the public assistance system. They were the ones who were too old for the day nursery and too young for school.

To respond to this need, despite the financial burden it would impose on an agency that was already struggling to survive, Sister Rosalie added a day shelter to the day nursery for these children. While details also remain sketchy here, we know that it opened in 1854. This we learn from a letter of Sister Rosalie to the mayor of the XII\textsuperscript{e} arrondissement on 26 November of that year. In it she says, “Our Day Shelter is entirely finished and in a few days we will bring in the numerous children who are awaiting admission.”

Before continuing our discussion of this work, in which the city of Paris was to employ the Daughters of Charity for the first time,\textsuperscript{318} it would be worthwhile to look a bit more closely at this letter. It shows the kind of relationship of collaboration that Sister Rosalie was able to maintain with civil authorities, who, as a group, were not always favorably disposed to the Catholic Church. In this letter, Sister Rosalie suggests the names of two women as possible “inspectresses”

\begin{footnotes}
\item[318] Registre des Conseils Généraux 1846, 4 February 1846, AFCP.
\item[319] Letter of Sister Rosalie to Monsieur Leroy de Saint-Arnaud, mayor of the XII\textsuperscript{e} arrondissement, 26 November 1854, AFCP, 8J2 - Ro - Le 280.
\item[320] Melun, Vie de la sœur Rosalie, 68.
\end{footnotes}
for the work on behalf of the arrondissement. She does so gently and respectfully, assuring the mayor that the work would benefit from their “intelligence” and “zeal.”

More significant, perhaps, is the human and spiritual tone of the letter. Sister Rosalie tells Monsieur Leroy de Saint-Arnaud that she is “very happy” to learn that his health is improving. Then she adds, “I thank God for this new grace that He is granting our arrondissement. We have too great a need of your devotedness and your solicitude for Him to raise up an obstacle to it by illness.”

What, then, do we know of the shelter itself? It appears to have been a sort of “welcome center” where children, who might otherwise have been forced “to vegetate in the gutters or die under the wheels of a carriage,” could come during the day to play and to learn. We do not know how many children there were but the number must have been significant because Melun speaks of Sister Rosalie’s “little battalions.” He is, however, undoubtedly exaggerating when he claims that “all the children of the neighborhood abandoned the streets for the shelter.” Be that as it may, the city government was sufficiently impressed by the sisters’ work with the children to take over the operational costs while leaving the actual work to the Daughters of Charity.

Sister Rosalie also took great pleasure in visiting the shelter. These visits gave her the opportunity to see the sisters in action and to admire their creativity and dedication in finding pleasant ways to instruct, occupy, and amuse what surely must have been an unruly band. Thus, the small house on rue de l’Épée-de-Bois was serving children from birth through the end of primary school.

Third, the *Ouvroir* (1849). While providing for the youngest of her charges, Sister Rosalie turned her attention to the eleven-to-fourteen-year-old girls who had completed elementary school but whom she judged too young and too ill-equipped to enter the work force. For them, she expanded the concept of practical training that, as we mentioned earlier, had begun before 1830 for children having difficulty with the usual school curriculum. According to Sister Cécile Maurin, tradition had it that Sister Rosalie was concerned about girls

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521 Letter of Sister Rosalie to Monsieur Leroy de Saint-Arnaud, 26 November 1854, AFCP, 8J2 - Ro - Le 280.
522 Melun, *Vie de la sœur Rosalie*, 68.
523 See Desmet, *Sœur Rosalie*, 133.
of this age from working class families, and that she asked the sisters to have them come on Thursday mornings to initiate them to domestic tasks. It would appear, however, from other testimony, that at least some of the participants were older, as was customary in ouvrières of the period.

Sister Tissot speaks about this work and states that several of the students “stayed to complete their apprenticeship and became good workers and later [the] best animators to lead the [group] of young girls who came to the social center.” Another witness, Mademoiselle Marie Baccoffe de Montmahaut, who had known Sister Rosalie since childhood, relates simply that the ouvrière was a prelude to the “schools of domestic science” that would come later in France. Finally, Father Desmet, unfortunately once again without citing his source, quotes a former student, “I was at the ouvrière.... We worked well there. Oh, how well [Sister Rosalie] formed all of us! We were not lazy. We learned everything. Nothing was too much for us.”

Sister Rosalie’s correspondence with Madame Badin, whose husband was the administrator of the Gobelin factory in Paris and later of a similar one in Beauvais, shows her efforts on behalf of these girls and young women and her success in finding work for them. Together they helped many women and their families escape misery.
Before leaving the subject of the ouvroir, we should examine this collaboration between Madame Badin and Sister Rosalie. It is another example of the development of a deep friendship that had its roots in the love of God and in the service of those who were poor. We possess twenty-four letters of Sister Rosalie to Madame Badin, written between 18 July 1848 and 5 February 1855. The texts, in the Archives of the Motherhouse of the Daughters of Charity in Paris, are photocopies. The originals remain in the possession of the Badin family, indicating the value they place on them.

It appears from the letters that, while she lived in Paris, Madame Badin was intimately involved with the work of the Ladies of Charity. This group, founded by Vincent de Paul, himself, in 1617, for the service of the sick poor in their homes, had been disbanded during the period of the French Revolution of 1789. In early 1840, Father Étienne, who, at the time, was the Procurator General of the Congregation of the Mission, and Viscountess Le Vavasseur, wife of an Advocate General in the Court of Paris, set about starting it anew.

Madame Le Vavasseur had made a pilgrimage to Saint Vincent's birthplace near Dax in southwestern France and came to realize that this seminal work of the Apostle of Charity had disappeared. Upon her return to Paris, she approached Father Étienne because she saw the urgent need for such a service in the capital for families living in misery, whose numbers were growing daily. Encouraged by the Archbishop of Paris, Monseigneur Affre, and Father Étienne, she gathered together a group of twelve women to form the first re-established Confraternity of the Ladies of the Sick Poor. Monseigneur Affre and Father Étienne put them in contact with the pastor of the Parish of Saint-Médard and with Sister Rosalie.

The results of this collaboration extended well beyond expectations. In the Life of Monsieur Étienne, we read:

The pastor of Saint-Médard rejoiced to have found auxiliaries to support his ministry for those in need. The sisters, delighted to see themselves assisted in their heavy task, did not know how to express their gratitude to the pious persons who shared their devotedness. The poor blessed their new benefactresses and often gave them the most desirable of recompenses for their dedication by returning
sincerely to God and to the practice of the Christian life.\footnote{329}

During the very first year, the twelve Ladies and the sisters of rue de l'Épée-de-Bois made 5,000 visits and distributed 10,727 francs to the sick poor in the parishes of Saint-Médard and Saint-Pierre-du-Gros-Caillou. As a result, the work quickly expanded to other parishes and even to the provinces. By 1852, there were 519 members in Paris who had distributed 338,574 francs in 22 parishes in the city.\footnote{330}

We have two reports to Father Étienne from Sister Rosalie on the accomplishments of the Ladies, dated 30 March and 9 June 1840.\footnote{331} They reveal that the services rendered went far beyond visits to the homes of the sick poor, although their Rule was formulated on the original drawn up by Vincent de Paul. The Ladies prepared persons who were poor to receive their First Communion, helped to have marriages regularized by the Catholic Church, and had children enrolled in Catholic schools. In the report of 30 March, Sister Rosalie wrote enthusiastically:

I am pleased to speak to you of the satisfaction that we are experiencing at seeing the good the Ladies of Charity of Saint Vincent de Paul are doing for the sick poor of our quarter. They have visited 392 sick persons.... These honorable Ladies render various services with a charity and an understanding worthy of the holy mission which has been entrusted to them. Please, Father, express our gratitude to them. We share this most sincerely with those who are poor and urge them to continue their kind and charitable concern.\footnote{332}

While Sister Rosalie asks Father Étienne to express to the Ladies her gratitude, and that of the sisters and of those who were poor, it is certain that she did so herself whenever the opportunity presented itself. Encouragement, support, and gratitude were staples of her collaboration with all those who shared in her ministry. This explains,

\footnotes{
331 Dames de la Charité, ACMP, Tiroir 132.
332 Ibid.}
in no small measure, her ability to find and retain collaborators from all levels of society including the public and private sectors. Her correspondence with Madame Badin illustrates this.

It is evident from Sister Rosalie’s letters to her that Madame Badin was active in this work. We do not know if she was part of the original twelve, or if she later became a member, as the first letter we possess is dated 18 July 1848. By this time, Madame Badin appears to have been the President of her group since Sister Rosalie sent a list of people needing clothing to her stating that, if she could not take care of this matter herself, she should turn the names over to another Lady.  

The letters are filled with requests for all types of services for persons needing assistance, and Sister Rosalie returns often to “knock at the door of [Madame Badin’s] charitable heart.” She seeks assistance for children, widows, wives of insurgents who had been on the losing side during the Revolution of 1848, and piecework for the young women in the ouvoir as mentioned above. She also does not hesitate to ask Madame Badin to intervene with her husband when his influence is viewed as essential for the development of the works. Such was the case when she sought to obtain the buildings on rue du Banquier for the expansion of the school. She was very specific on what she wanted him to do on her behalf, and had no doubt that it would be accomplished. She tells her friend, “I am counting completely on him and on you for the realization of this good work.” She was not disappointed.

But Sister Rosalie was never simply the supplicant dealing with the powerful on behalf of her “beloved poor.” Madame Badin was a collaborator and a cherished friend. Sister Rosalie cared about her, her well-being, and her family. When she heard that Madame Badin had lost her father-in-law she wrote, “I understand your pain and share it with all my heart.” She then goes on to say that she will pray for him and have others do so too. She asks Madame Badin

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333 Letter of Sister Rosalie to Madame Badin, 11 September 1848, AFCP, 8J2 - Ro - Le 220 B5.
334 Ibid., 3 October 1848, AFCP, 8J2 - Ro - Le 222 B6.
335 Ibid., 18 July 1848, AFCP, Ro - Le 216 B1; 7 September 1848, Ro - Le 219 B4; 3 November 1850, Ro - Le 246 B17.
337 Ibid., 28 August 1848, AFCP, Ro - Le 217 B2.
338 Ibid., 3 October 1848, AFCP, 8J2 - Ro - Le 222 B6.
to remember her to her husband and to assure him that she and the sisters “share his justified grief.” She then reminds the family of the just reward that awaits their beloved. She tells them, “The good that Monsieur Badin has done should be a consolation for you. God will not fail to reward him.”

Sister Rosalie was distressed when her friend had to move to Beauvais. Her concern was for herself but also, and especially, for the suffering inhabitants of the Mouffetard district. She wrote:

I do not want to delay any longer to ask news of you and to share mine. I am better and am profiting from this to repeat our deep affection and my sincere regret to see you so far away. It is a real deprivation for me. Our poor experience the void and, with reason, regret the loss they have sustained.

She encourages her friend to not only continue in serving those who are poor, but to pay attention to her own health. She writes, “You [now] have more time for yourself. Take care of the poor. They will be less demanding than in Paris. You had so many concerns [here] that your health was the victim.” She then urges Madame Badin to send news as often as possible and to provide “details of what interests [her].” Here, as elsewhere, Sister Rosalie’s thoughts are of others.

Before leaving Sister Rosalie’s correspondence with Madame Badin it would be worthwhile to point out an important element of her charity which we find there, namely its universality. The letters show that Madame Badin’s sister had lost her husband. As a result, there were apparently some financial problems that might have interfered with her ability to provide for her son’s education. Sister Rosalie did not hesitate to use her own influence on behalf of this family, which had done so much for those who were poor for so long. She assured Madame Badin, “I will write to her and to the Reverend Superior. He must receive her son among the scholarship students. There are obligations that I shall not fail to point out.”

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339 Ibid., 1 September 1848; note on the same paper dated 7 September 1848, AFCP, 8J2 - Ro - Le 218 B3.
340 Ibid., 3 November 1850, AFCP, 8J2 - Ro - Le 246 B17.
341 Ibid.
342 Ibid.
Thanks to her friendship and collaboration with Madame Badin, the indigent inhabitants of the Mouffetard district and the young women of the ouvroir were better served. Women and their families began to move out of misery and Sister Rosalie was deeply grateful. In the very last letter to Madame Badin that we possess, she acknowledges her friend's lifetime work, “You have sown well. Others will reap the harvest. You will have a great share in the merits of this work of charity.”

Fourth, the Patronage (Social Center). Sister Rosalie was reluctant to see young women formed by the sisters leave completely. She feared that work and family responsibilities would cause them to abandon the practice of their religion. So it was that when, around 1840, her friend and collaborator Armand de Melun began, in collaboration with Jean-Leon Le Prevost and other confreres of the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul, to develop social centers for boys, she followed the initiative with interest.

We do not know precisely when the social center opened at rue de l’Épée-de-Bois, but according to Sister Tissot, Melun came frequently to talk with Sister Rosalie about this work. She saw its merits and its possible adaptation for young women and so she set about implementing it in the house. Melun quotes her as saying, “The work is good.... God will see that it succeeds.... We will begin next Sunday.”

The program was a simple one: instruction on religious and social responsibility, practical advice, sharing, and recreational activities. Sister Rosalie came herself, on occasion, to speak with the young women. She also persuaded some of the Ladies to come and to serve as mentors for them. We learn from Sister Tissot how quickly the work grew and how popular it became for the young women. In the beginning the sisters invited young women they knew, and encouraged them to bring their friends to the meeting. Later, the young women themselves did the recruiting. The method proved successful,

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343 Ibid., 4 February 1855, AFCP, 802 - Ro - Le 286 B24.
345 Sacra Congregatio Pro Causis, Rendu, Positio; Sommaire, 55.
346 Melun, Vie de la sœur Rosalie, 75.
indeed, "The first time forty came. Some Ladies also came. Three months later, there were eighty young women. Later their number increased to one hundred thirty." Thus, these young women were helped in their Christian, personal, work, and family lives. But still it was not enough. Something additional was needed.

Fifth, the Association of Our Lady of Good Counsel. We are not certain of the date, but we learn from Sister Saillard and from Melun that Sister Rosalie founded, in the house on rue de l'Épée-de-Bois, an association for young women who had been leaders in the social center but were now working or married and were, therefore, too old for the group or unable to attend the meetings because of their schedules. She asked these women to become mentors to the younger ones, to assist the Ladies who worked with the group, and to replace Sunday meetings with visits to the homes of those in need or other works of charity.

Sister Rosalie took a special interest in the members of the association and introduced them herself into the service of those who were poor. She taught them the respect and gentleness that they were to bring to this privileged work. Each one gave what she could. Melun speaks of a particularly touching example:

...two young laundresses, who had neither money nor free time, came each week to collect the laundry for a poor old woman who had been confided to their care. They brought it back the following week, laundered and repaired.

By working so closely with these young women, Sister Rosalie hoped to influence both their workplace and their home. She supported them as they made their way into the world of work which would be theirs for the remainder of their lives. Should they go on to more responsible positions, the lessons of the social center and the Association of Our Lady of Good Counsel would enable them to be good mentors for the apprentices working under their supervision.

Young mothers learned how to raise their children and how to maintain a Christian atmosphere in their homes. Even in the last

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57 Sacra Congregatio Pro Causis, Rendu, Positio; Sommaire, 55.
58 Ibid., 63.
59 Melun, Vie de la sœur Rosalie, 77.
60 Ibid., 78.
years when she became blind and could no longer leave her bedroom or little parlor, Sister Rosalie followed the activities of the association closely. She was anxious to hear about the meetings and about each of the members. She did not hesitate to send for them to encourage them or to reprimand them for some failure.

Her gratitude for the assistance of the Ladies was unfailing and she made certain that they were aware of this. Together with them, she sought ways to improve the work. The Sunday before her death she was occupied in up-dating the by-laws for the association.\textsuperscript{351}

Thus, through a combination of creativity and daring, Sister Rosalie found a way to provide integrated, holistic service from the cradle through adulthood and family life. All this was accomplished while the children or young adults remained within the social milieu in which they were born and where they would, in all likelihood, live out their lives. In her testimony, Sister Saillard wrote that Sister Rosalie:

\ldots did not want to place children in orphanages; she thought that it was much more useful for young girls to experience the miseries of their poor home and the struggles of life than to spend a long time cut off [from them] and [then] find themselves, without transition, in a world with the dangers of which they were unaware. She did not want to open orphanages which are so numerous today.\textsuperscript{352}

Sister Saillard's contention is supported by Sister Rosalie's own writings. Her letters to the Empress Eugénie\textsuperscript{353} and to a friend who was teaching young children\textsuperscript{354} reveal that she was adamant in her view that the education provided by the sisters should conform to the needs of the district, and that the children should not be removed from it only to return later unhappy and ill-adapted.

\textsuperscript{351} Ibid., 80.
\textsuperscript{352} Sacra Congregatio Pro Causis, Rendu, Positio; Sommario, 63.
\textsuperscript{353} Letter of Sister Rosalie to Empress Eugénie, June 1854, AFCP, 8J2 - Ro - Le.
\textsuperscript{354} Cited by Melun, \textit{Vie de la sieur Rosalie}, 61-62.
Circumstances beyond her control, however, would oblige Sister Rosalie to alter, at least in some cases, her opposition to orphanages. The revolutions of 1830 and 1848 and, especially, the cholera epidemics of 1832, 1849, and 1854, would produce many orphans in the heavily hit Mouffetard district. Thus, in 1851, when misfortune struck the Orphanage of rue Pascal, she sent Daughters of Charity from rue de l'Épée-de-Bois to serve the children there.

Sixth, the Orphanage of rue Pascal (1851). In his biography, Melun credits Sister Rosalie, aided by the able and generous assistance of Madame Jules Mallet, with the foundation of this work. This, however, does not seem to have been the case. Much later, in a note added to a letter of Sister Rosalie’s to Madame Mallet, dated 30 January 1854, Madame de Witt, Madame Mallet’s daughter, states, “Letter to my mother, Madame Jules Mallet, who had founded in the neighborhood, the asylum for little orphans, rue Pascal, Saint-Marcel district, during the cholera [epidemic] of 1849.”

This seems to be substantiated by a letter of Madame Mallet herself in which we learn that the two Sisters of Providence, who had been running the orphanage on her behalf, had fallen ill themselves and that she was going to turn to the Daughters of Charity for assistance. She wrote:

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555 Ibid., 161.
My poor sisters, directresses of the house for the orphans, are both sick and are being recalled by their community. I hope to get some [sisters] of Saint Vincent de Paul. This would be a great security for me because my good Sister Rosalie would thus be their superior and I could withdraw little by little.\footnote{Madame de Witt, \textit{Une belle vie}, Madame Jules Mallet, née Oberkampf (1794-1856), \textit{Souvenirs et Fragments} (Paris, 1881), 109-110.}

Madame Mallet did indeed obtain Daughters of Charity from the house on rue de l'Épée-de-Bois. Sister Rosalie placed 79 children at rue Pascal and became deeply involved with their care. She frequently went there to see that everything was in order. By 1852, though, the number of children had increased to a point where the facility was no longer adequate. The children were moved to a larger facility on rue Ménilmontant. Another group of Daughters of Charity assumed responsibility for the work which continued to prosper and which bore the marks of Sister Rosalie's presence, particularly "the simplicity in which [the children] were raised, and the ...thought that, after their first communion, [they] would be returned, as far as possible, to the common life and to an apprenticeship outside."\footnote{Melun, \textit{Vie de la sœur Rosalie}, 162.}

Thus, Sister Rosalie's experience with an orphanage was limited. She preferred to serve children within their own social milieu.

From this examination of the works due to Sister Rosalie's initiative, it is apparent that her great thrust was toward work with women and children. There was, however, another group that touched her heart and whose sufferings she sought to alleviate, namely the elderly.

Seventh, the \textit{Shelter for the Elderly} (1852). During an era when society in general had no safety nets for its most vulnerable members, those who could no longer work because of age and growing infirmity were in particular need of assistance. We have already seen that most of Sister Rosalie's requests for assistance addressed to Monsieur Colette de Baudicour, who was Administrator of the 16th Division of the Bureau of Public Assistance in the Saint-Marcel District, were for food, clothing or money for elderly men and women served by the "house
of charity” of rue de l’Épée-de-Bois. She used all her influence to find placements for the elderly at the Hospital for the Incurables or at Bicêtre which, at this time, provided care for the elderly and mentally ill no longer able to remain in their own homes.

It was not always easy to convince elders that the time had come to give up their independence and humble dwellings to seek care. It took all Sister Rosalie’s powers of persuasion to obtain their consent, and her concern for them did not stop when she had found them a place. Sister Tissot tells us that:

...she gave [those being placed] a letter for the chaplain [containing] ...some money to be distributed to them, from time to time, [in the form of] tobacco or alcohol. She remained in touch with them by interesting letters. I was responsible for this correspondence for three years. I was supposed to tell them that our Mother continued to think about them, that she awaited news of them, and that she urged them to draw closer to our Good God. When one of their letters announced that they had been to confession, I had to respond immediately and tell them how happy she was about the well-being of their soul.360

The placement process, however, could be a lengthy one. The number of elderly needing care was large and places in a hospice were few and widely sought after. With her usual creativity and daring, and without any reliable source of revenue, Sister Rosalie found a temporary solution for her beloved elders when there was danger of their finding themselves on the street.

When the orphanage of rue Pascal outgrew the facility and moved to rue Ménilmontant, Sister Rosalie rented the space as a shelter for elders. There she assembled aged couples, whom she called her “celestial court,” and assured them free lodging until they were admitted to a hospice or died. Their surroundings were simple but clean and safe. They could bring furniture or tools with them, and those who were able could still do some work to help defray expenses.

359 Sacra Congregatio Pro Causis, Rendu, Positio, 53-60.
360 Sacra Congregatio Pro Causis, Rendu, Positio; Sommaire, 56.
Sister Rosalie and the sisters looked after the physical well-being of the “guests.” They also strove to bring them back to the Church and the sacraments. Many of those who had strayed far from the Christian life in their younger years returned to it in the calm and peaceful environment of the shelter, which became a sort of “gateway to heaven and novitiate for eternity.”

Throughout her last years, Sister Rosalie took particular pleasure in visiting the day nursery and the elders’ shelter. She frequently brought visitors with her and introduced them to the guests whom she knew by name and whose stories she was able to share with these potential benefactors. Nevertheless, the financial base for the elders’ shelter was very shaky and a source of permanent concern for Sister Rosalie despite her conviction that Providence would provide. Melun states:

The expenses for the shelter did not exceed a few thousand francs annually. But the house resembled the [guests] whom it served. There was no revenue attached to it. It depended on daily good will for its rent. This never failed. At the end of each quarter, anonymous hands regularly came to bring the money necessary for the next period. Nothing in this liberality, however, could be thought of as a commitment or even a promise. The incertitude troubled Sister Rosalie.

During her last illness, she often spoke of the shelter and of her desire to see it on firm footing before she died. She was frequently heard to say, “I will only die happy if I can give this work a solid and lasting character and assure my poor elders that they will never be put out of their home.”

At the moment of Sister Rosalie’s death, her wish had not yet been realized. There was still no guarantee that this work, that was so dear to her heart, would survive her. However, eight months after her death, on 1 October 1856, her beloved elders took up residence in a house purchased in the district to provide, in perpetuity, shelter

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361 Melun, *Vie de la sœur Rosalie*, 84.
for the elders of the XIIth arrondissement. The initial funds had come from Sister Rosalie's friends. Then the Bureau of Public Assistance took over the work and assumed a major portion of the expenses. This collaboration of the public and private sectors to meet the needs of the elderly, which was a part of Sister Rosalie's legacy, found a fitting monument to her in the "Saint [sic] Rosalie Shelter."

From 1830 to 1856, Sister Rosalie expanded works in education and health care that already existed at rue de l'Épée-de-Bois, providing services to those who were poor in the Mouffetard district that extended from the cradle to the grave. These required creativity and daring on her part; all the more so because they developed during a tumultuous and often deadly era in France.

While she was seeking to alleviate the affliction of the already suffering population, the external forces of war and disease would descend upon them turning misery into death and devastation. The times would be dangerous but Sister Rosalie, with the quiet, unshakable courage that she had learned from her mother during the Revolution of 1789, would meet all challenges. Regardless of personal peril, she would be on the barricades and at the bedside of the cholera victims. For better or for worse, these are the events upon which Sister Rosalie's reputation is based. We shall now try to follow her during this troubled period and discover the woman of God behind the heroine.

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365 Ibid., 86.